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2 June 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

FROM : Vernon A. Walters, LTG, USA  
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT : NSSM 242 on Italy

1. I find myself in profound disagreement with the NSSM 242: U.S. POLICY TOWARD ITALY draft. It is based, in my view, on the false assumption that the PCI is just another party with the same ideological and disciplinary problems of other "democratic parties." I believe this is a false assumption that leads to other false assumptions.
2. Throughout the paper there runs an assumption that the Communists don't want to take power in Italy or that they feel unprepared to do so. The PCI is large with membership in the millions. Communist parties with membership in the thousands have taken power. There is nothing in the history of communism anywhere to indicate a reluctance to take power, nor is there any case where, once having taken power, if things don't go well, they will leave and let democratic processes operate.
3. That the Communist leftist government would be regarded by them as a "worst case" is patently absurd in the light of their behavior throughout history. The idea that the rank and file of the Communist Party need to become accustomed to the idea of the PCI as a governing party is very far fetched. The statement that "One of Berlinguer's aims in formulating the historic compromise was to lay to rest the notion of a leftist government...." simply boggles my mind as does the statement that "The PCI reportedly feels inadequately prepared to take on these additional responsibilities (sic)."
4. The paper also notes that the PCI is wary of having the Socialists as its principal coalition partner. This is absurd. The Socialists have less than half as many votes as the Communists and wherever they have taken power, the Communists have eaten the Socialists first, well ahead of the Rightists. The idea that the

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Communists would "leave the government" has no historical evidence to support it. Communists don't leave the government. They take it over. The idea that a communist-dominated government would be "psychologically unprepared to take power" speaks for itself. It is further said that a leftist (PCI-PSI) government "...provided it sought to honor the democratic process...." I wonder if there is any case where a communist party has sought to honor the democratic process.

5. I also believe that there is no historic precedent anywhere to support the idea that the "... Communist leaders in the near term would eschew proposals that imply sweeping changes in the constitutional order." If near term means a few weeks, I could agree. If it means a few years, there again there is no precedent to support this naïve idea. Further in the paper it states that the PCI "rejects massive nationalization." I can only describe this as naïve.

6. I have rarely, if ever, written a memo such as this one, but I cannot in good conscience refrain from drawing your attention to what I believe is an ingenuous misconception of what the Italian Communist Party is. If this view is adopted as US policy, I believe the results for the U.S., for NATO, and for the free world will be disastrous.

/s/ Vernon A. Walters

Vernon A. Walters  
Lieutenant General, USA  
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

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